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SUBJECT: THE CASAMANCE: A SHRINKING REBELLION PRESENTS REAL OPPORTUNITIES

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1B. DAKAR 2012

1C. DAKAR 1932

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROY L. WHITAKER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

11. (C) The Casamance rebellion has shrunk to a limited geographical area, with less public support, greater logistic difficulties and more constrained operational capabilities than at any time since war began. Deprived of a Guinea-Bissau base and under pressure from animist spiritual leaders to compromise, Movement of Democratic Forces of the Casamance (MFDC) recalcitrant Salif Sadio has bullied conciliatory rivals, enlisted their followers, won access to Gambian sanctuary, and retains a serious nuisance capacity for minor armed strikes and banditry. Casamancais desperately want infrastructure investment, and real opportunity exists for development outside the receding war zone. For an election-preoccupied President Wade, though, redirecting economic resources to the Casamance is not now a priority. This cable reflects a late September reporting trip by the Defense Attache, Political Counselor and Senegalese Political Assistant, as well as more recent developments, such as Abbe Augustin Diamacoune Senghor's evacuation to France for medical treatment. END SUMMARY.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF WAR AND PEACE

12. (C) MFDC rebel capacity has now retracted to a triangle roughly defined, at its outermost limits, by the Gambian border, Route Nationale Five leading from Bignona toward Banjul, and, for a certain distance, Route Nationale Four from Bignona toward Farafenni. Zones previously vulnerable to attack have now been effectively cut off from rebel activity or from rebel influence. In Sedhiou, the prefect, a former deputy prefect and others told us the weakened rebels are now unwilling to risk being outgunned and boxed off on the Sedhiou peninsula. Throughout the eastern part of Ziguinchor Region, the largely ethnic-Jola MFDC simply no longer has popular support in areas dominated by a mix of other ethnic groups.

13. (C) Even in Jola areas, we heard in varying terms from a UNHCR sociologist, the Senegalese Defense Attache in Banjul, and especially Bignona mayor and ex-Defense Minister Youba Sambou, that rebel loss of prestige has coincided with reduction in military capacity and loss of territory. Outsiders may see the Casamance as a geographical unit and the Jola ethnic group as a single entity, but local views are

different. Ousmane Sane, a sociologist with UNDP, told us the Jola are broken down into more or less discrete dialectical, cultural and especially religious zones, and that many of these zones across the southern and eastern Casamance have come to reject MFDC armed struggle. We encountered evidence of such rejection even in the northern triangle where Sadio continues to operate. The imam of Bignona says he has pushed the &maquisards8 to seek a negotiated solution, and that he is now intensely concerned about his security after recent armed banditry in the town that he attributes to rebels from the MFDC. Sindian's imam told us he had been pushing Sadio to compromise just before Guinea-Bissau launched attacks to destroy him in March, and fears that Sadio felt betrayed and will try to punish him.

SALIF SADIO: VICTORY FOR THE VANQUISHED

14. (C) Sadio, the leader of the MFDC's armed Atika faction, may have been dislodged militarily by a coalition of Guinea-Bissau's armed forces with pro-conciliation MFDC factions headed by Mancane Dieme and Caesar Badiate. In political terms, though, he recouped masterfully by moving north, displacing his MFDC rivals and recruiting some of their fighters, and possibly, though this is disputed, by assuming their role in cultivation of cannabis and cutting of timber for export across the border into The Gambia. Sadio's announcement that he has split politically from the MFDC to lead his own Movement for the Liberation of the Casamance People (MLPC) has created a new political dynamic. Most importantly, while Sadio had been identified with the southern Casamance, he appeared to have very quickly reached an understanding with the Gambians. The military zone commander of Ziguinchor, Colonel Sow, as well as troops stationed in the Sindian area, tell us Sadio enjoys ready

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Gambian sanctuary. Colonel Sow claims the army has the initiative and that Sadio leads a diminished military force, though he also concedes Sadio's fighters are well-trained and battle-hardened. In any case, it is clear the Army will be hard-pressed to prevent rebel penetration of the border for small-scale attacks or large-scale banditry.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND THE REALM OF THE SPIRITS

15. (C) Bignona mayor and ex-Defense Minister Youba Sambou tells us resolution of the conflict will be "political, cultural and 'cultuel.'" Sadio may be bloody-minded and brutal, he explains, but his willingness to use violence is buttressed in villagers' eyes by cult or spiritual legitimacy. While MFDC political leaders such as the Abbe Diamacoune were Catholic priests and the rebellion included Muslims, Youba says Sadio's authority stemmed from traditional spiritual guides, the keepers of sacred forest glades. These animist forest worshipers, unrecognized outside their villages and lacking any administrative or political power, had attributed authority of command to Sadio. They are now tired of war, feel the people's growing despair, and therefore, Youba contended, are pushing Sadio toward reconciliation. If he continues to refuse, he predicted, these cult leaders will exercise their right and power to withdraw Sadio's authority and grant it to someone more flexible. This new leader would chair a unified command of all armed MFDC factions, and would lead in defining a common position towards the GOS.

CASAMANCAIS SEEK CONCRETE AND CANNERIES

16. (C) Casamancais are divided on the wisdom of army return to northern Casamance villages. Some believe the army presence creates an opportunity for renewed GOS-MFDC talks. The Cadres Casamancais, an association of regional executives, have called for establishment of a "college de négociateurs," of prominent Casamancais to speak on the region's behalf and negotiate a definitive peace accord, beginning in February 2007) two years after the last round

of peace talks.

¶7. (C) Others call for a more incremental or functional approach in which economic conditions for peace are built before negotiating a peace accord. The animated-over-a-beer historian Nooli Cisse argues "we've had enough of these damned seminars! No more 'capacity building.' Give us roads and canneries and a maritime network from Dakar to Ziguinchor -- that's the kind of capacity we need!" Cisse was unusually emphatic, but his view is shared by some others, including Alain Diedhiou, the MFDC-linked Catholic priest who is being transferred to a parish in Avignon, and ex-Prime Minister and presidential candidate Idrissa Seck on his tour of the region (Ref A). (COMMENT: Their views notwithstanding, USAID's capacity-building program continues to enjoy broad support in the MFDC and the Government, which recognize that the MFDC has lost sight of its agenda and needs to find a face-saving formula to conclude a lasting peace. END COMMENT.)

¶8. (C) Sedhiou-based NGO "Enfance et Paix" argues that the GOS, now that it has reintroduced troops into formerly demilitarized zones, must state clearly that it wants to settle the conflict peacefully. Failure to do so will discourage combatants from abandoning the maquis. Indeed, there are signs of new recruitment. Women's leader Mame Kenny told us the maquisards are enlisting decommissioned soldiers unable to find other jobs. The GOS and donors must make some real movement toward consolidating the ceasefire that exists in many zones, these NGO's argue, and the only way to end violence, forestall crime and assure stability is to provide infrastructure, job-creating investment and a modicum of social services.

¶9. (C) Each zone has special needs. Sedhiou's prefect notes the city's isolation for want of bridges and roads, while the ex-subprefect says the entire Department has two doctors for 400,000 people "when they're both here." The imam of Bignona describes young people's "seething frustration." Oumar Lamine Badji, Ziguinchor Regional Council President, laments that joblessness in the north has brought a "scandalous" overexploitation of forests by both Senegalese and Gambian businessmen. Beach-blessed Cape Skirring is nowhere near meeting its tourist potential.

COMMENT

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¶10. (C) Removal of Salif Sadio's hard-line bases from the Guinea-Bissau border area has brought significant and perhaps qualitative differences to the Casamance: 1) the conflict is now geographically limited to the northern areas on the Gambian border; 2) Sadio, who recouped from his southern losses by taking over his rivals' territory in the north, retains considerable nuisance value because of his Gambian sanctuary; 3) the MFDC political leadership, even before Abbe Diamacoune's recent hospitalization and evacuation to France, had become virtually irrelevant to most Casamancais; 4) war-tired villagers continue to seek resolution of the conflict, and, while we cannot confirm it, some believe animist spiritual leaders are becoming more engaged in the search for a compromise short of independence; 5) Casamancais universally demand infrastructural development, and some think this can and perhaps should precede attempts to reach a negotiated peace settlement.

¶11. (C) There has been recent armed but non-violent banditry, almost certainly linked to current or former members of the MFDC. The army is making its presence known even in some areas not threatened by rebels, as on the road from Ziguinchor to Cape Skirring, and some contend the army presence exacerbates tension and deepens instability. We are not convinced, but it is true that military forces now deployed cannot stamp out armed crime or interdict all small-scale incursions from the Gambian border area. As long as The Gambia allows sanctuary for Sadio, armed forays will

continue. Overall, though, new constraints on the MFDC maquisards offer a real opportunity for the GOS to commit to peaceful resolution of the conflict and to offer some hope of economic engagement in the Casamance. With its attention fully focused on February elections, there is little sign this will happen for at least several months. END COMMENT.

¶12. (U) Visit Embassy Dakar's classified website at
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/af/dakar>.

JACOBS